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AMERICAN ART-WORK IN SILVER.



O branch of our American Art-manufactures has made such rapid progress during the past twenty-five years as that devoted to the production of designs for household use in the precious metals. Silver is the most popular medium in the hands of our skilled artisans, and, after gold and platinum, it is the most unchangeable of metals, as it does not oxidise in dry or moist air. It is also the most lustrous of all the metals and is susceptible of the highest polish, or may be finished in a variety of novel styles at the will of the artist. By alchemists it was accepted as the emblem of the pale, "silvery" moon, under the name of Luna, or Diana, and some of the salts of silver are called "lunar" to this day. It tarnishes rapidly in sulphuretted hydrogen, owing to its great affinity for sulphur; it is from the presence of sulphur in eggs and in mustard that it is necessary to gild the bowls of silver spoons used for these seasoning articles.

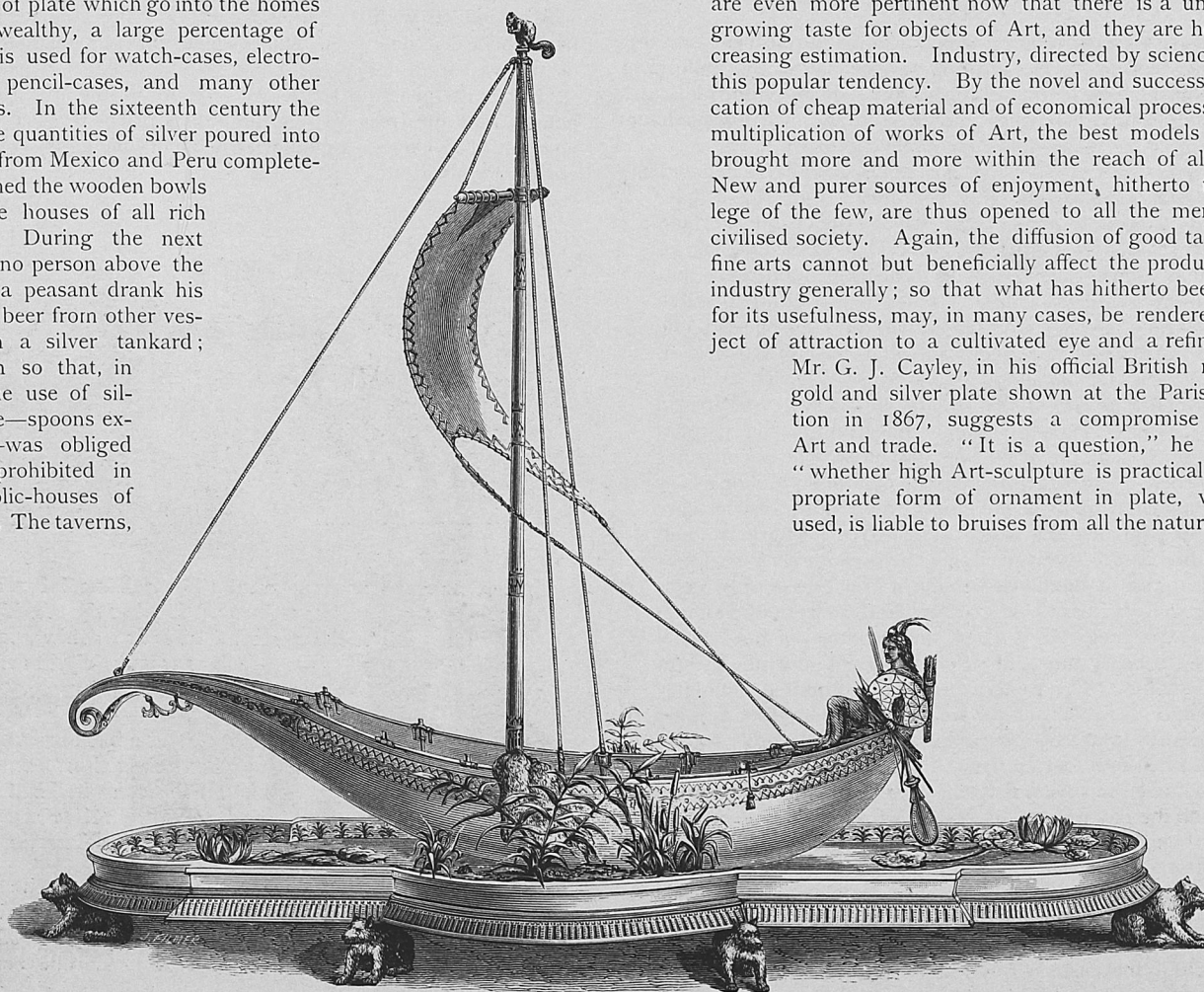
Owing to the constantly-increasing demand for silver bullion, or coin, for Art-manufacturing purposes, it is interesting to know whence the supply comes. In 1873, the reported yield of the silver-producing countries was about \$65,000,000, and, of this sum, Nevada, Utah, Idaho, and other States and Territories, contributed more than \$30,000,000. Much of the grand aggregate production of silver is used for coining purposes, and a proportion for manufactures. The coining of the new American trade-dollar has absorbed considerable silver bullion, and nearly all of this coinage has been sent to China and the East Indies. Of the value of the silver Art-manufactures of the world no just estimate can be made, as, in addition to the services of plate which go into the homes of the wealthy, a large percentage of bullion is used for watch-cases, electroplating, pencil-cases, and many other purposes. In the sixteenth century the immense quantities of silver poured into Europe from Mexico and Peru completely banished the wooden bowls from the houses of all rich persons. During the next century no person above the rank of a peasant drank his wine or beer from other vessel than a silver tankard; so much so that, in 1696, the use of silver-plate—spoons excepted—was obliged to be prohibited in the public-houses of London. The taverns,

indeed, had usurped the place of the churches in the possession of silver articles; and a profusion of plate is still to a great extent the characteristic of the *cafés* of Paris. The extension of the manufacture of silver articles is intimately connected with the extended use of tea—the manufacture of teapots, sugar-basins, spoons, and forks, employing, it is believed, more than half of all the silver used for every purpose, and of this quantity the spoons take the chief part.

As early as the fourteenth century we find that the display of silver-plate was often extensive in the houses of the English nobility; and existing specimens show the exquisite taste often exhibited in mediæval times on such objects. The author of a song, written in the time of Edward II., says it would have been better for the nobles to have eaten out of wooden vessels, and to have paid for their provisions with silver, than to eat off silver and pay for their provisions with wooden tallies. The huge salt-cellar, usually of silver, was a conspicuous object on the table. Another appendage of the dining-table of the fourteenth century was the ship, used to contain spices and sweetmeats; it also held the forks, spoons, and napkins. It was placed on the banquet-table before the seigneur. Little enamelled shields hung over the sides, charged with the armorial devices of the owner. Piers Gaveston, in 1313, had a ship of silver on four wheels, enamelled on the sides. Again, in the sixteenth century, we find that the dresser was made of great importance, and much attention was paid to the display of plate upon it; and this fashion prevails to some extent at the present day, both in England and the United States.

Of silver as an Art-material the observations made by the jurors at the first London International Exhibition are even more pertinent now that there is a universally-growing taste for objects of Art, and they are held in increasing estimation. Industry, directed by science, fosters this popular tendency. By the novel and successful application of cheap material and of economical processes to the multiplication of works of Art, the best models are daily brought more and more within the reach of all classes. New and purer sources of enjoyment, hitherto the privilege of the few, are thus opened to all the members of civilised society. Again, the diffusion of good taste in the fine arts cannot but beneficially affect the productions of industry generally; so that what has hitherto been valued for its usefulness, may, in many cases, be rendered an object of attraction to a cultivated eye and a refined mind.

Mr. G. J. Cayley, in his official British report on gold and silver plate shown at the Paris Exhibition in 1867, suggests a compromise between Art and trade. "It is a question," he observes, "whether high Art-sculpture is practically an appropriate form of ornament in plate, which, if used, is liable to bruises from all the natural shocks



No. 1.—Fruit or Flower Stand.



No. 2.—Design for Border

which dinner-services and tea-trays must encounter; and, if not used, might just as well be statuary on a small scale, unencumbered by an unnecessary adaptation for holding salt, tea, coffee, sugar, or claret. It is very probable that Art might be better applied in making the services of the table as effective and as artistic as they could be made at a purchasable figure by bold conventional decoration, vigorously conceived and carefully designed, with a view to rapid and trenchant reproduction in quantities, after much thought had been devoted to the original. As it is, the *chefs-d'œuvre* now produced by exceptional Art-workmen do not seem to react at all favourably on the style of ordinary plate, which remains as vulgar as ever, and is sold at a remunerative profit to a tasteless public, attracted by the reputation of unsaleable Art-treasures."

In the Art-manufactures of the United States it was not until very recently that we had any organised companies engaged in the work. Throughout the country almost every village of five thousand inhabitants has had its silversmith engaged in the manufacture of silver spoons, but the production of artistic designs in the form of tea and dinner services is of comparatively recent origin, and is

to-day almost completely monopolised by the great manufacturing companies in the larger cities. It was thought that the introduction of electro-plated ware, which is a modern invention, would lessen the demand for solid silver objects, but this is not so. The production of the artistic designs of the Meriden Company, and other electro-plating corporations, appears to have stimulated a taste for the beautiful, and our manufactures of solid silverware are not only the equal in gracefulness and originality of the best work executed in the *ateliers* of England and France, but they are annually rapidly approximating it in value and volume. As evidence of the high esteem in which the work of the American artisans is held in Europe, the orders filled by Messrs. Tiffany & Co., during the past summer, are conclusive. The Gorham Company, established originally in 1831, was one of the first to engage in the production of artistic silverware on a large scale. Tiffany & Co. organised their workshop at a more recent date. In addition to these great companies engaged in the work, there are the Whiting Manufacturing Company, and several others of importance. One of the first services of plate executed in the United States and sent to Europe was manufactured by Messrs. Tiffany & Co., for the government,



No. 3.—Yachting Prize-Cup.

for presentation to the arbitrators on the so-called "Alabama claims." The designs were not particularly novel, but the beauty and solidity of the workmanship drew warm praise from the Art-critics of the London press who were in attendance at the Vienna Exposition, where the plate was exhibited.

Machinery is not used to any considerable extent in the manufac-

ture of silver-work, if we except certain specialties, such as spoons and forks; and, even of these, many are still made by hand, although the ornaments on the handle are generally produced by stamping, or by letting the object pass between rollers or dies in which the pattern is cut. But, in the production of silver designs of a high character, machinery performs only a small part. The

process of forming and decorating hollow vessels may be described as follows: First, a plate of silver is slowly and carefully hammered up into the form required, and the design of the parts to be raised is marked out; then the artist applies his hammer to the inside, and beats up the parts to appear in relief, taking care to raise them rather more than is to appear in the design when finished. After this process the exterior has a bruised appearance, not very promis-

ing; he next fills the vessel with melted pitch, which enables him to hammer with his punches and cut with his chasing-tools, until he has modified the rudely-raised projections into forms of beauty, in accordance with the design; or, at another time he will, with punches of a similar nature, cover the entire surface of the work with a rich diaper of foliage. An English writer says a common objection urged against both French and English plate is, that it



No. 4.—Plaque.

is disfigured by the violent contrasts of dead white picked out with burnish. Neither condition of surface is favourable to the display of form. The white takes scarcely any shade, and the burnished surface reflects other colours too much to show either its own colour or shape. The best surface for sculptured silver is smooth, but not polished, with a delicate open fretwork of cross-hatchings, formed by short chisel-marks, which produce the effect of a deli-

cate grain. A similar, but much richer, effect is produced by the so-called satin finish, which is now so popular in the American workshops, and oxidising and judicious gilding of the raised surfaces are much admired. Polish is produced by rubbing the surface with a succession of cutting-powders, getting finer and finer in grain, till the polisher finishes with rouge applied by hand. Its principle is, wearing down inequalities of surface. Burnish is ob-



No. 5.—Plaque.

tained by applying strong pressure and friction of a brilliant surface, in steel or agate, to the smooth metal. This pressure consolidates the grain of the silver, and reproduces by contact the surface of the tool on the object to be brightened. But the force used has a vibratory action, which marks itself in the tremulous reflections seen in burnished plate, while the gentle

rubbing repays its greater labour by an even, soft repose of surface.

As examples of American Art-work in silver, we present six designs selected from the Bond Street exhibition-rooms of the Gorham Manufacturing Company. They possess the merit of originality, and are designed by T. J. Pairpont.

No. 1, a stand for fruit or flowers, is entitled 'Hiawatha's Canoe, and is designed to illustrate an incident in the career of Hiawatha, as related in Longfellow's poem of that name:

"Swift or slow at will he glided,
Veered to right or left at pleasure,

All alone went Hiawatha
Through the clear, transparent water."

The body of the canoe shows the satin finish, and rests upon a burnished plateau in lieu of water, and from which spring the water-lily, the cat's-tail, and other familiar American marsh and water plants. Hiawatha reclines in the stern, and is equipped with a shield, bow, and quiver of arrows, and guides his graceful canoe by means of a paddle. The sail is of silver-gauze, and on the top of the tall mast is perched a squirrel. The whole is supported on the backs of crouching bears.

No. 2 is a design for a border, for a vase, cup, or similar article.

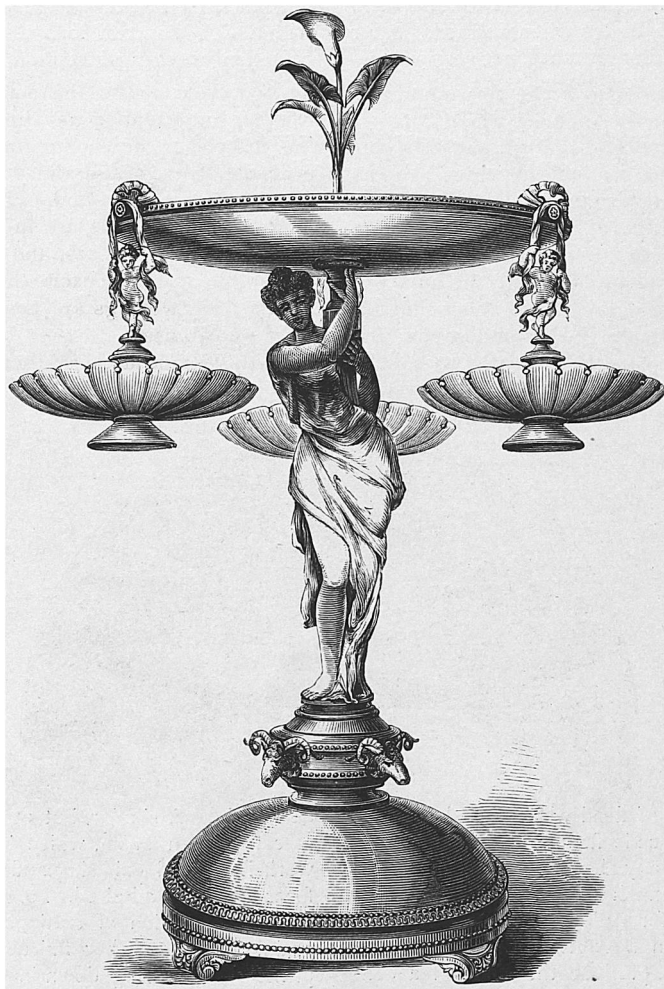
No. 3 is a 'Yachting Cup' of oblong form. The base is ornamented with dolphins, and is bound at the top with a cable. The design on the side of the bowl is in low-relief, and represents a female figure holding in her outstretched hand a miniature yacht. The background represents water, and the design is intended to typify that element. At one end of the bowl there is a sea-horse carrying a sailor-boy on its back, and, at the other, a

sailor grasping a foul-anchor. From the overhanging ends depend wreaths of victory. The sculptured work is exquisitely wrought, and the general effect of the design is massive and elegant.

Nos. 4 and 5 are solid-silver *plaques*, oxidised and wrought in low-relief. They are intended as ornaments for the sides of a centre-piece, and represent the 'Feast of Flowers.' For oblong compositions, it must be conceded that the designs are very graceful.

No. 6 is a large *épergne*, or centre-piece. The base is in the form of a burnished dome, supported upon massive feet, and ornamented with rams'-heads. The standard is a graceful female figure, her form draped in a classic costume, and oxidised or finished in the natural colour of the silver. The pose of the figure is light and airy, and in her hands she holds a standard which supports the broad-swelling bowl. From the centre of the bowl spring a group of leaves and the flower of the calla lily; and from its rim are suspended, equidistant apart, three scollop-shaped baskets, which are intended, when in use, to be filled with flowers—real or artificial as the taste may dictate. The finish shows a rich intermingling of oxidisation, gilding, and burnishing, and the effect is superb.

In the presentation of these designs, it is gratifying to the Art-taste of the country to know that they represent American ideas, and are typical in a great measure of indigenous scenes and matter.



No. 6.—Fruit or Flower Centre-piece.

NEW WORKS AT THE CORCORAN GALLERY.



THE new works of Art recently received at the Corcoran Gallery of Art at Washington are of unusual interest. Copies in marble of Rinehart's 'Endymion' and 'Sleeping Children,' by the artist's own hand, enrich the small but select collection of marble statuary. The last of these two works is familiar to many, as the sculptor was kept busy in making copies of its touching beauty. The 'Endymion' is a replica of the original executed for Mr. J. W. Garrett, of Baltimore, and is a recumbent statue of a shepherd-boy sleeping upon a rock. Whatever may be thought of its merits as illustrating the sentiment of the classic story, it is considered Rinehart's masterpiece for perfect modelling, ease, and grace of posture.

Five pictures have been purchased: 'Charlotte Corday,' by C. L. Müller, 1875; 'The Fortune-Teller,' by C. Macarri, 1874; 'Corn and Grapes,' E. Perelli, 1875; 'Fun and Fright,' by Chierici, 1875; 'French Cuirassiers bringing in Bavarian Prisoners,' an *aquarelle*, by Edward Detaille, Paris, 1875; and a portrait of John Randolph of Roanoke, by Chester Harding. Of these choice additions, the 'Charlotte Corday' and Detaille's *aquarelle* are the most valuable.

The former is a work of fascinating interest, and is by the painter of the famous 'Roll-Call.' Charlotte Corday (a half-length, life-size) gazes through her prison-window, her right arm and hand holding a pen, supporting her drooping head and pale, lovely face.

Detaille's *aquarelle* is full of military character and minute pencilling, with all the richness of oil-colours. He is evidently the rising artist of France in such subjects, though he is but twenty-six years old. A guard of three French cuirassiers, pistol in hand, watch the light-blue-coated Bavarians brought in by an officer of lancers. The easy, nonchalant air of the latter, the unconcern of the flaxen-haired captives, and the stolid, stiff figures of the guard, are in admirable contrast, and the national characteristics well preserved. 'Fun and Fright,' by Chierici, a Milanese artist, is a characteristic picture of serio-comic humour, representing a scene in a kitchen, where a mischievous boy at the door has just taken from his face an ugly mask, and is enjoying the fun of the fright it has caused to his little sister. The portrait of John Randolph, by Chester Harding, is admirable. The small head, the clear hazel eyes, the shrivelled, boyish-womanish features, the pugnacious, upturned nose, and the silky, parted hair, are given to the life.